A QUICK & EASY GUIDE TO ASEXUALITY

MOLLY MULDOON & WILL HERNANDEZ

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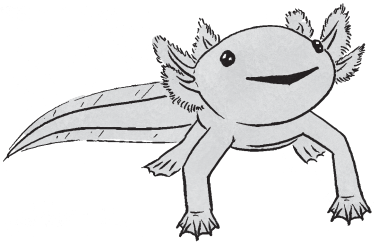

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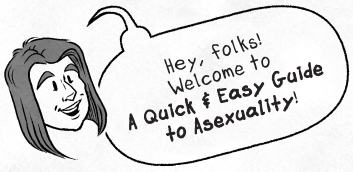


Who Should Read This?

Anyone! This is an extremely basic introduction to asexuality for asexual people, folks questioning whether they might be ace, and anyone hoping to understand more about asexuality from two rad aces (which would be us, hi again!).

Content Warning!

Some things we (briefly) cover might be triggering or upsetting. Unfortunately, our society is imperfect, and our lives reflect this. We'll discuss harmful stereotypes and tropes that run rampant in pop culture and society at large. There will be mentions of sexual violence, medical discrimination, depression, rejection and invalidation, and general internet nastiness. Nothing will be graphically depicted or discussed to a graphic degree, but please proceed with caution.

What We're Covering:

This book will cover what asexuality is, how it affects different aspects of a person's life, and how it is viewed by culture and society. We'll also discuss common misconceptions, dating and sex, representation—or the lack thereof—and our own personal thoughts and experiences with all of this.

What We're NOT Covering:

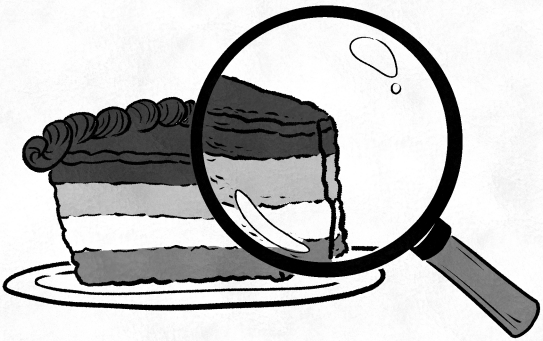
This is a quick and easy guide, so we focused on the topics above. If you are looking for specific sexual instruction, relationship advice, or deeper analysis of the "Split Attraction Model," we have listed resources in the back of the book that might help! Ultimately, this is a positive exploration of a sexuality that isn't widely understood by society—because everyone deserves to be accepted and respected. We hope that you learn something from this and maybe even do some of your own exploring after you read! Either way, we're glad you're with us.

Oh, hey! Didn't see you there!
We were just talking about **asexuality**.

See, we're both asexual, and we've realized not many people seem to know what that means.
Which is why we decided to make this book, to maybe help some people out with that. We're not experts, but we have lived experience and have done our research.

So this book is about **asexuality**: what it is and what it isn't.
How it **molds people**, from **growing up**, to dating and sex.
How it affects daily life, how it's represented in the media...
And anything else that seems important.
So if you're ace...
Or not...
Or somewhere in between...
This book is for YOU!

What is Asexuality?



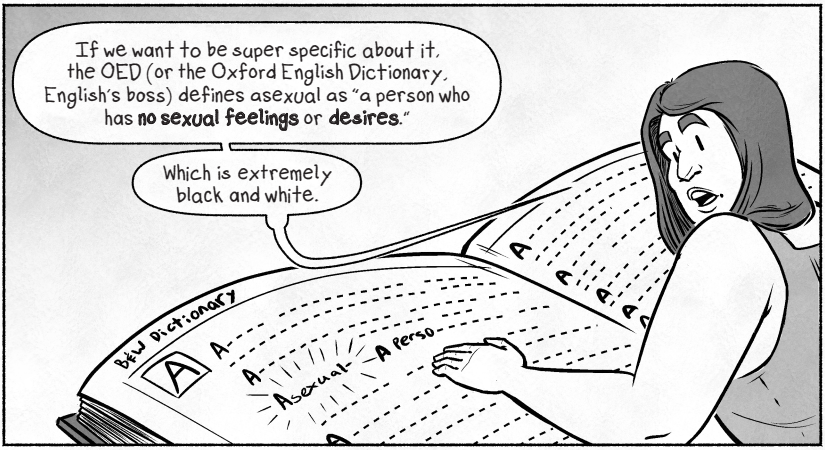
The first thing we need to do is demystify
ASEXUALITY!
You'd be surprised at how much people **don't** know.
Or just **assume**.
Firstly, the most important thing to know about is asexuality is that it means not feeling sexual attraction.
That's it.
It has nothing to do with **romance**, it has nothing to do with **actually having sex**, it's just about attraction, or in this case, the lack thereof.
People don't always seem to grasp that.

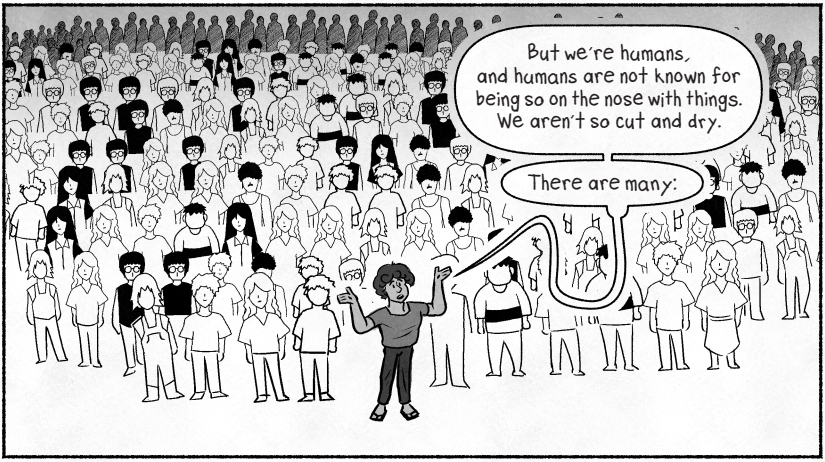
If you're not asexual, you're allosexual, be you gay, straight, or anywhere on the spectrum. "Allo" and "ace" are the terms people usually use.
And allo people usually don't quite understand what it means to be ace.
If you're trans, I'm sure you get a lot of weird questions. If you're bi, I'm sure you get asked a lot of weird questions.
If you're ace?
Here are just a few of our weird questions.

Common Questions Aces Get Asked:

Are you sure it's not just a hormone thing? You should go see your doctor, get some tests done...
For some people, maybe? But for most ace people, it has nothing to do with hormones, just the fact that they don't feel sexual attraction.
Oh no! Did you have a, you know, "bad experience"?
You should see my therapist, they're great. Really good at helping you deal with...trauma.
Therapy is a good thing, for sure, but it's alright, I don't have any past trauma.
Some people might become sex-repulsed from a previous experience. But being ace is about sexual attraction, not the act of sex itself.
So no, trauma won't "turn someone ace."
Oh, don't worry. You just haven't met the right person yet.
Oh, um. Thank you for that, I suppose. But being ace isn't about "meeting the right person" or not. It's about feeling sexual attraction or not.
I could very much find someone I love and be perfectly happy with them as well as still being ace.

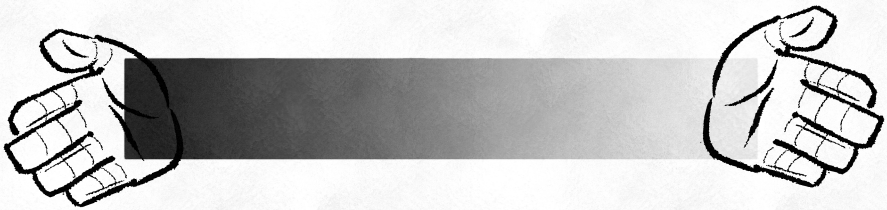
There are two important things to note in those answers.
One: The common thread that no matter what you do or how you act, being ace is about not feeling sexual attraction and nothing else.
And two: It's different for everyone.
Action ≠ Attraction
Asexuality
That's because "asexuality" is an umbrella term. It can cover a whole wide spectrum of feelings and desires.
People feel a whole mess of different ways, but if they share a common thread of not feeling sexual attraction toward people—even if it's only sometimes—they're asexual.





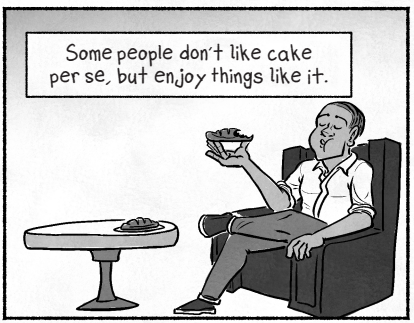
SHADES OF GRAY

The Spectrum of Asexuality



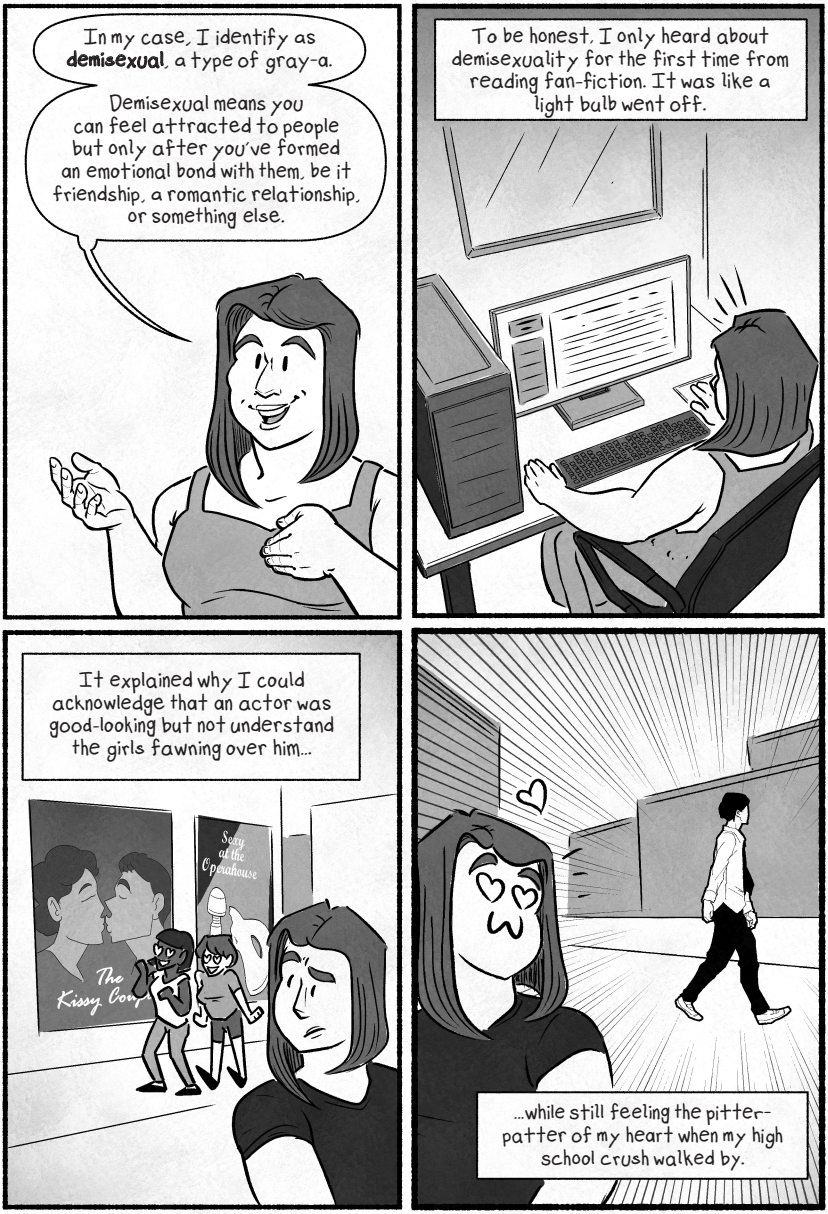
'Cause here's the thing:
Just like everything else when it comes to humans, asexuality is a **spectrum**.
You could fall anywhere on it or find yourself moving around.
Some people want nothing to do with sex.
Some people have different feelings depending on different factors.
And some people are super cool with sex.

~This is a metaphor~



I'm hungry now...
All those people could fall under the ace umbrella.
Wait! If I'm reading this right—
Yep, the cake is sex.
—then how come all of these so-called "asexual people" are...
Eating it? Having it?
You know what I mean!
That's easy, friend! It's because being asexual has nothing to do with what you actually **do**.
Your orientation is about your feelings of **attraction**, or in this case, **lack thereof**. Sex is an action that you perform.
If you can eat when you're not hungry, you can have sex without being sexually attracted to someone.
ACTION ≠ ATTRACTION
But isn't that ...wrong?
Well, if you don't want to have sex, then yes, of course. If it's not something you want to do, then don't do it. Period.
But if you want to, then that's perfectly fine as well. Plenty of asexual people have and enjoy sex for plenty of reasons, from enjoying intimacy with their partner to enjoying the act itself.
...I still don't understand.

Remember that spectrum we were talking about? It has to do with that.
A lot of people assume asexual people are utterly sex-repulsed and want nothing to do with it. Those people are to one **far side** of the spectrum.
Most people don't fall so easily in those categories, though, and they are somewhere along this spectrum from **sex-repulsed** to super **sex-charmed**.
That's why so many ace people identify as...
GRAY-A!
Even though most people will just call themselves ace, a lot of people are more in a **gray area**, hence **gray-a**. Ace is just an easier shorthand.
Like saying you're from Boston or Seattle rather than your suburb when you're far from home. Makes it easier for people.

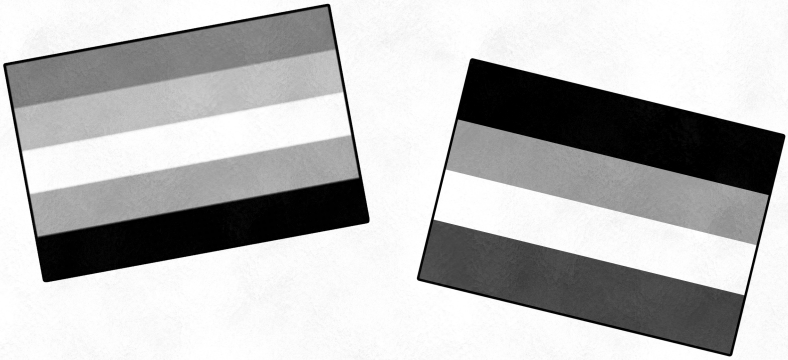

In my case, I identify as **demisexual**, a type of gray-a.
Demisexual means you can feel attracted to people but only after you've formed an emotional bond with them, be it friendship, a romantic relationship, or something else.
To be honest. I only heard about demisexuality for the first time from reading fan-fiction. It was like a light bulb went off.
It explained why I could acknowledge that an actor was good-looking but not understand the girls fawning over him...
Sexy at the Opera House
The Kissy Boy
...while still feeling the pitter-patter of my heart when my high school crush walked by.

As for myself, though I use "asexual" as a pretty accurate and **baseline descriptor** to generally sum up my experience. I feel my identity is a bit more complicated than any set of labels can describe...
On the one hand, I can comfortably say that I've never felt any real "sexual attraction" to anybody I can recall...
I've never been able to look at someone as other than their mind and personality, no matter the situation...
That's not to say I can't acknowledge when someone has that "sex appeal" going for 'em, but my brain just kinda goes, "Yeah, I don't care, that's still a regular human thing."
And, hehe, funnily enough, I feel I've made many sex worker friends over the years due to the fact my brain just doesn't respond to the "would-be adverts" in the typical way.

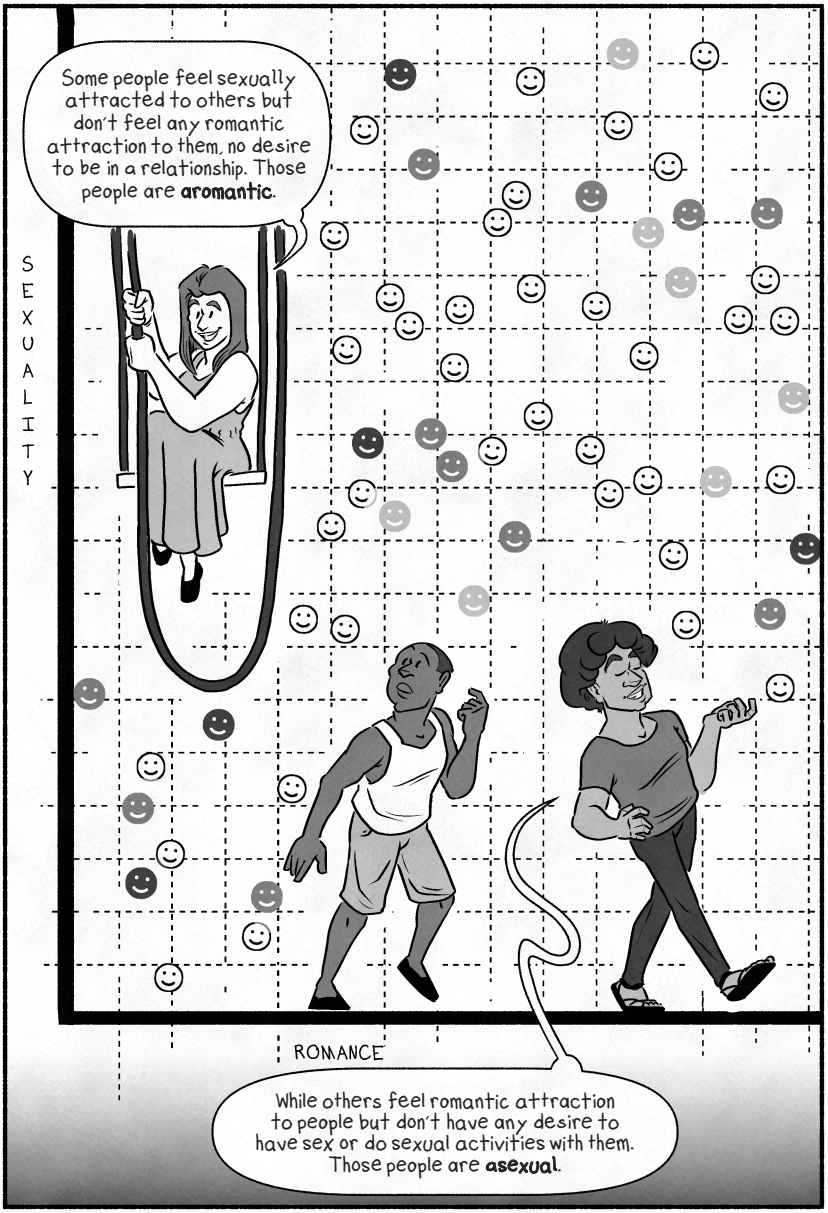
But on the other hand, I'm not repulsed by it either. In fact, I think it's really cool and fun and interesting to think about!
It's really facinating anthropologically to see and learn about how much of a driver sex is worldwide, and how it impacts and plays a role in every nation and culture.
And back to a personal level, I'm still very open to the possibility of sex in my own relationships, though I won't die if that isn't a possibility for any reason, since it's not much of a requirement I hold.
I, and many other aces, in fact, do have a perfectly functioning sex drive. But for me, it bubbles up from inside rather than being "activated" externally.
So not being directed at anyone in particular, I'm fine managing myself, with or without company.
I could go into more nuance than can fit in a single book. Heck, I haven't even **begun** to talk about my feelings on romance and relationship stuff!
TLDR: The spectrum is complicated, and humans are more complicated than a series of binaries.

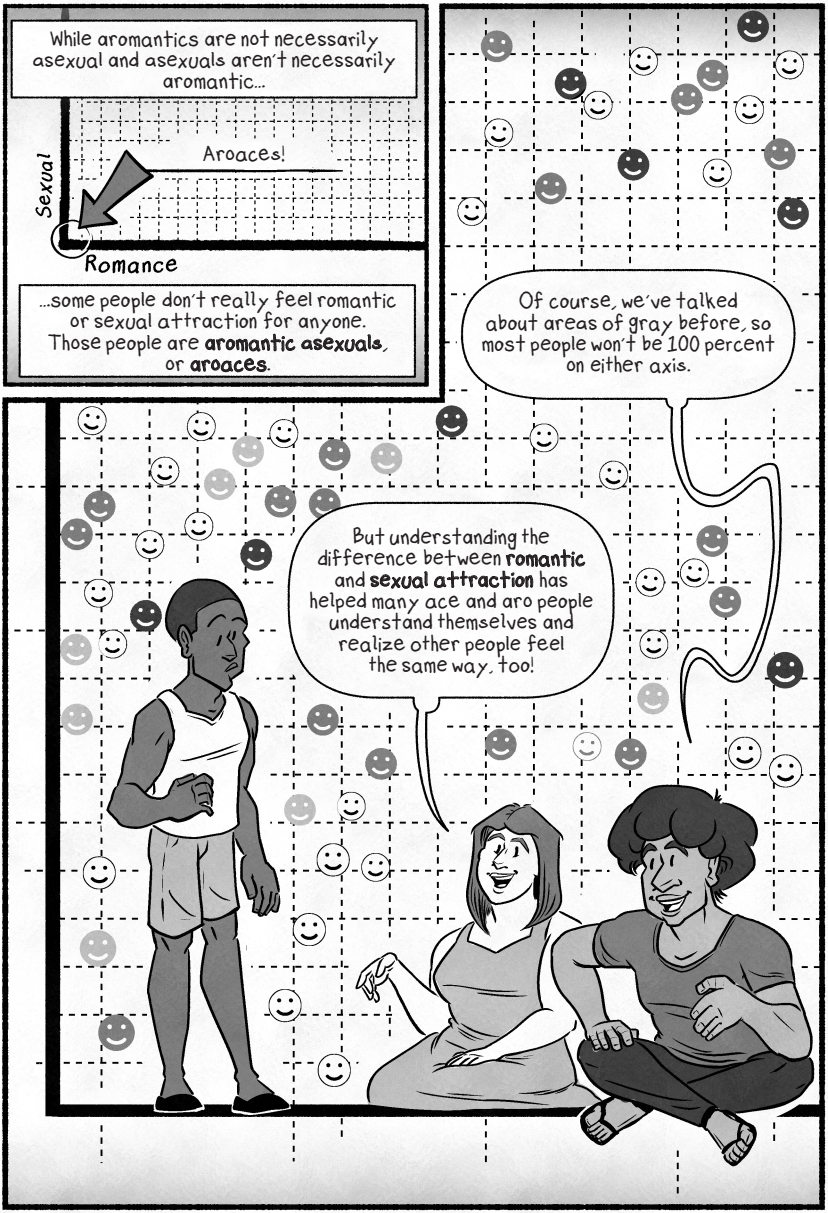
Wait, wait, wait. What are you talking about, having a romantic relationship? I thought these people were asexual?
They are.
Then how can they be in a romantic relationship?
They're **asexual**, not **aromantic**.
What?

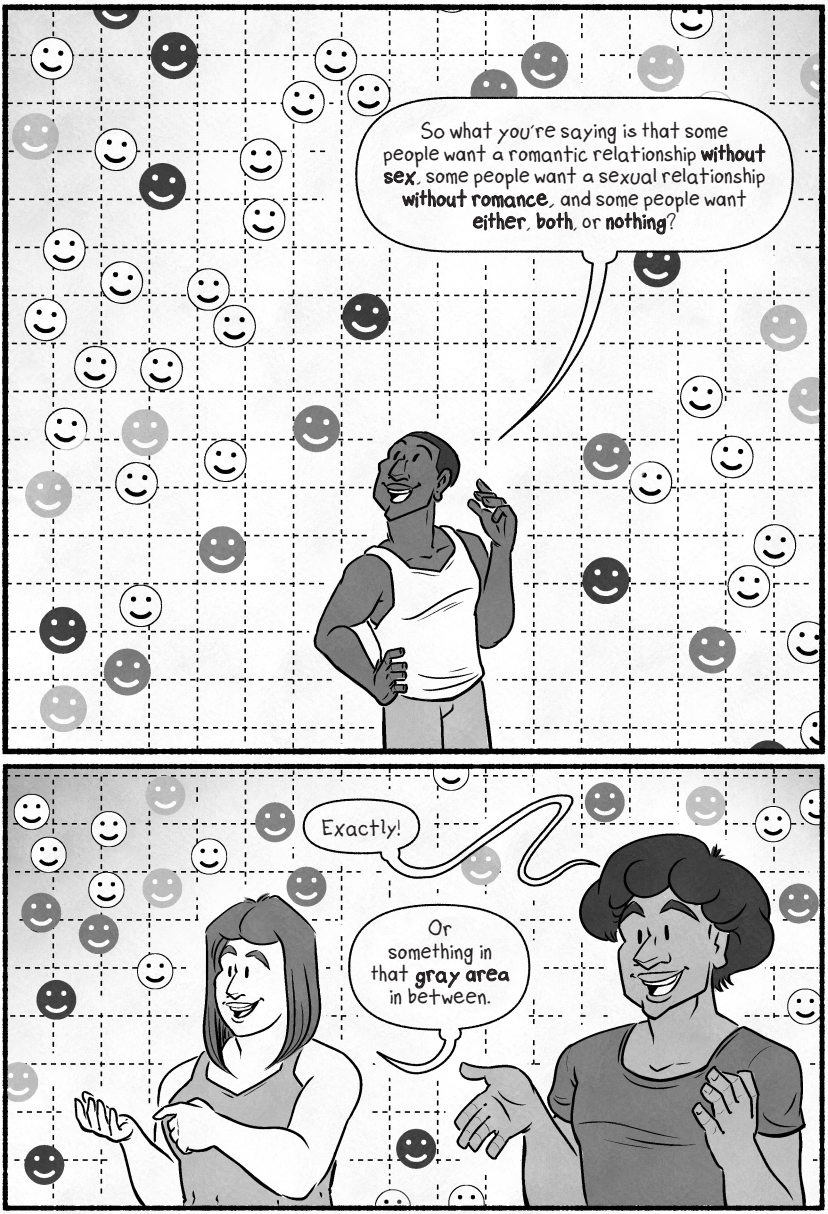
Asexuality and Aromanticism



Just like how some people don't feel any sexual attraction, other people don't feel romantic attraction. Those people are **aromantic**!
...I am very confused.
This is something called the **Split Attraction Model**. This is an incredibly simplified version of it.
Not everyone likes to use it, but it can be very handy for explaining **ace** and **aro** identities.
Split Attraction Model
Sexuality
Romance


Some people feel sexually attracted to others but don't feel any romantic attraction to them, no desire to be in a relationship. Those people are **aromantic**.
SEXUALITY
ROMANCE
While others feel romantic attraction to people but don't have any desire to have sex or do sexual activities with them. Those people are **asexual**.


While aromantics are not necessarily asexual and asexuals aren't necessarily aromantic...
Aroaces!
Sexual
Romance
...some people don't really feel romantic or sexual attraction for anyone. Those people are **aromantic asexuals**, or **aroaces**.
Of course, we've talked about areas of gray before, so most people won't be 100 percent on either axis.
But understanding the difference between **romantic** and **sexual attraction** has helped many ace and aro people understand themselves and realize other people feel the same way, too!


So what you're saying is that some people want a romantic relationship **without sex**, some people want a sexual relationship **without romance**, and some people want **either**, **both**, or **nothing**?
Exactly!
Or something in that **gray area** in between.

Okay, I think I understand that much.
Wait, wait. I need help with this.
What do you need help with?
We'll do our best!
Well, I understand the whole "relationship" thing, but... how do you guys **date**?
Can you only date asexual people? 'Cause surely a normal person would be uncomfortable giving up sex.
Where do you meet them? Is there an app for that?
Well, firstly, there is no "**normal**," just ace people and allo people.
And dating for aces is... well, still dating.

Dating While Asexual

As of the writing of this book, there is just one dating app for ace people, and it's...not great. There are some websites that let you list your sexuality as ace or demi, but people don't tend to read that.
Also, for people that are more in the gray area, being with someone who is more sex-repulsed than them or more sex-enthused than them could pose a problem.
Search Results 1
Meanwhile, say you're demisexual and you're on a date with a nice person. It's pretty hard to tell them, "Well, I like you as a person, but I'm not sexually attracted to you right now. Those feelings may come in the future, after we form a deeper emotional bond, but I can't promise that will happen, either."
That's a lot to put on anyone.

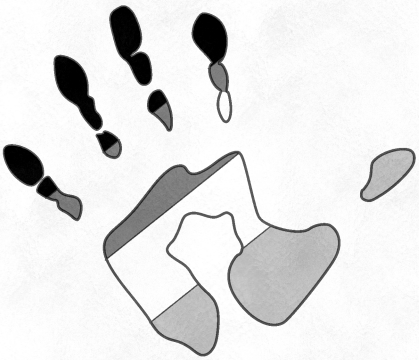
Along with that, if you're the type of gray-a who develops feelings after an emotional bond is formed, it means you can tend to fall for friends of yours, sometimes years after you've formed the friendship.
Which can make things awkward for both you and them.
Basically, for asexual people, that "spark" of attraction a lot of people talk about when meeting their partners just isn't there. Not because they don't like them, but because **attraction** and **sexual feelings** don't come into it.
Meaning, meeting people in more conventionally allo ways can be tricky.

It can also mean we are very bad at flirting or picking up signals from other people.
I always call the way I flirt "Jane Benneting," after the oldest sister in Pride and Prejudice. She's so nice to everyone that no one knows she's partial to Mr. Bingley.
Or, as it usually goes with me: "Why can't you see that when I'm nice to everyone I'm being polite, but when I'm being nice to you, it's because I like you?"
Very clear, I know.
And myself, as shy as I might get, I'm actually pretty flirtatious by nature, even with friends. So there's a bit of disconnect between doing it because I want someone's attention and just being comfortable around a person. As a result, I end up confusing myself as to how I'm feeling.

The main thing, though, is that **all** relationships are based on **trust** and **communication**, for asexual people or anyone else.
So as long as *you* and *your* partner talk about *your* relationship and understand each other, there's **nothing** *you* can't do.

Okay. I guess that all makes sense. The trusting and talking and all that.
But how did y'all get this way? You just didn't feel like kissing anyone at prom or...?
Well, it's a little more than that. Most asexual people are **born that way**, to borrow a phrase.
You mean, you've known since you were children? But that's too weird. Children shouldn't know anything about...
...sex.
Are you kidding? Kids are learning about sex and relationships from media from the time they're tiny!

Growing Up Ace



2001
To be fair, most of these differences aren't really noticed until puberty, when kids start chatting about the people they "like."
But Moulin Rouge is such a good movie! So romantic!
I don't know what's up with you, Molly, but Josh Hartnett is basically Josh HOT-nett.
2005
Even if the stereotype of girls being pure and virginal meant I didn't stand out in the crowd, it did mean I felt rather uncomfortable in gossip circles.
And then he grabbed my hand, pulled me forward, and kissed me!
Oooooooo!!!
I went to a movie with a boy once?

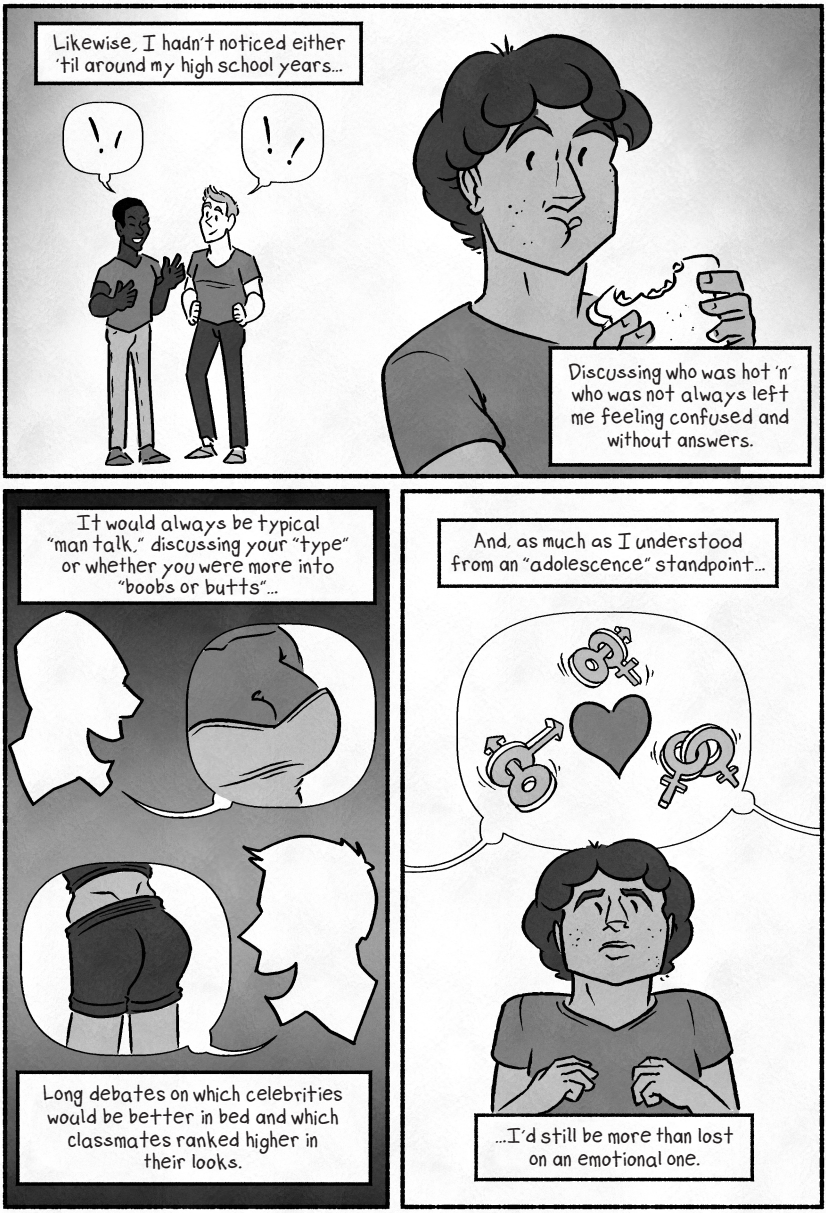
2007
Doctors in particular were hard to deal with.
So, why do you want to go on birth control?
Because I've been having irregular periods for years and birth control is supposed to regulate them.

Sure, right. Are you sure a boyfriend isn't pressuring you?
I'm very sure. I want it to help with my health.
Please.

2010
And they didn't get much better.
So you're saying you're not sexually active?
Yes.

You know I mean have you ever had sex, not just if you're having it now?
I know. The answer is still no.

So I need to know--
No, I'm not sexually active. Yes, I'm aware what that means. No, there is no way that I'm pregnant or have an STD, although if you really want to check, your receptionist made me provide a urine sample.
Thought I'd save you the trouble.
Doctors never quite believe you.


Likewise, I hadn't noticed either 'til around my high school years...
!
!
Discussing who was hot 'n' who was not always left me feeling confused and without answers.
It would always be typical "man talk," discussing your "type" or whether you were more into "boobs or butts"...
Long debates on which celebrities would be better in bed and which classmates ranked higher in their looks.
And, as much as I understood from an "adolescence" standpoint...
...I'd still be more than lost on an emotional one.

To an extent, it left me feeling very isolated and different from everyone else I'd come to encounter by then.

Like, there were feelings I'd never experience and it made me "broken."

For a good chunk of my life, I ended up self-isolating out of not knowing enough about myself and feeling I just wasn't meant to fit in...

...it led to a series of other mental health issues: depression, social anxiety disorder, PTSD...

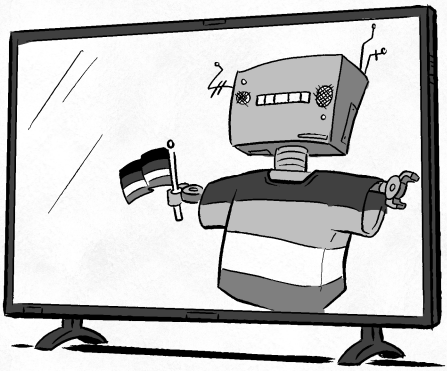
...all of which I still have to struggle with as an adult, heh.

Maybe the hardest part of growing up ace, though, is knowing you are different from your friends, especially considering how hard puberty and growing up are in the first place.
Since asexuality isn't talked about much, most people haven't heard of it and just think they're "broken," or something to that effect.
So the most important thing to remember is this: **You're not broken.**
You are complete the way you are, and there's **nothing** wrong with you.

You are valid.
You aren't broken.
You're not alone.

It's easy to forget that, though. How often do you see society in general talking about asexuality?
Not to mention the lack of asexual representation in media.
THE SEXY
It's been changing a bit in recent years, but there are still light years to go.
CLAP!
Not to mention the unfortunate stereotypes...

Ace Stereotypes



THE ASEXUAL GENIUS TROPE
This is almost always men.

They are so smart, they have deleted such things as love and sex from their brains!
They have no time for human feelings!
They are a genius!

It is, of course, very tragic that they are so very smart because they are also usually very good-looking, and so many people wish they could be with them.
But alas! There is no room in that giant brain for relationships because they have filled it all up with knowledge!
Sorry, attempted love interest!

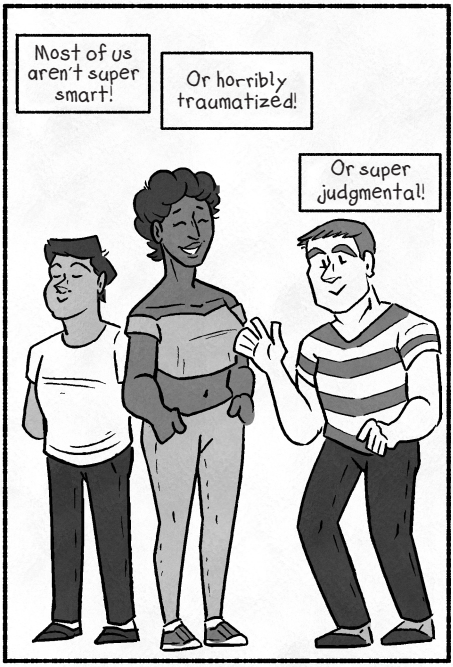
While we appreciate that the stereotype is not as awful as other stereotypes–
–and yes, some of us are pretty smart–
That's not a very accurate representation of asexuality.
Not only is one very specific type of person not going to be able to represent more than maybe a **handful** of people...
POOF!
POOF!
...but the implication behind it is not that the person is inherently asexual, but that they have chosen to forgo a basic human need for the good of knowledge.
We've come to the point that we realize sexuality isn't a **choice**, right?
I should hope so!

Also, sometimes they try to "fix" this genius by having someone come into their life and show them that they should give this sex thing a try because it could make them more "human."
?
Which is incredibly insulting to all of us very human asexual people who **aren't** in need of fixing.

When it comes to stereotypes for women, it tends to be one of two things. You're either a victim of trauma...
...or you're a "prude."
The trauma narrative implies that the only reason women wouldn't want to have sex is because they'd been hurt in the past.
Which we know isn't true, because a lot of asexual people have felt this way their whole life but didn't know what they were feeling was normal.
While many, many people are victims of sexual assault or trauma, this won't make a person asexual.
It might make them form a set of trauma responses, which can include sex-repulsion, but it won't change their fundamental selves.
You are not what is done to you, and this is a dangerous narrative to present.

Likewise, the "prude" narrative is all wrapped around the misconception that asexual people are no fun, repressed, or keeping a part of themselves locked away out of some desire to "be better" than other people, kind of like the asexual genius trope.
These people would be "way more fun if they just let down their hair a little," then maybe people would like them.
The problem, of course, is this implies the person actually does feel sexual attraction but is repressing for "moral" reasons. The "prude" is seen as rejecting a part of their humanity, and the world says the prude will be more authentic and more likable if they "let go."
This is clearly a problem, because it, again, makes asexuality an abnormality. Asexual people are just people who don't feel sexual attraction. They are in no way judging others for their choices. They're just **living their life.**

How do we solve this problem?
More representation!
All sorts of asexual people, all over the spectrum!


Most of us aren't super smart!
Or horribly traumatized!
Or super judgmental!

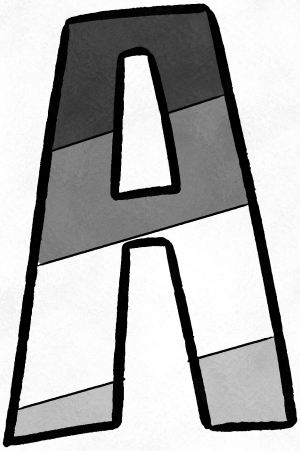
We have all sorts of different jobs!

And all sorts of different relationships!

Because we're all different people!

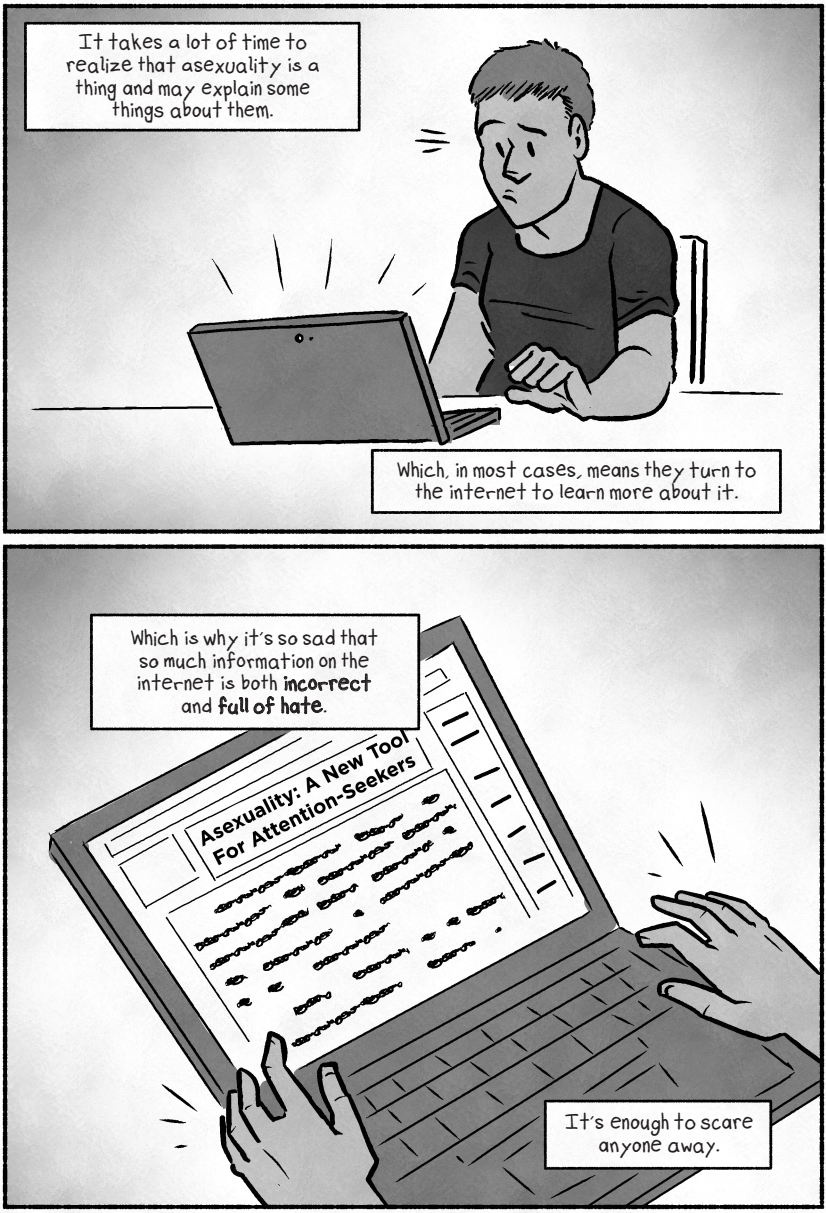
The only thing that will truly change the stereotype...
...is more evidence to the **contrary**.
Like with most things, the only thing that will **demystify** the ace experience is showing more and different depictions of the **ace experience**.
ACE
Fwoosh!
Which can be hard, because a lot of asexual people aren't even entirely sure where they stand in society.
?
Society 101

The "A" in LGBTQIA+



A lot of ace people don't feel like they fit into cisgender, heterosexual society because of their lack of interest in sex.
I don't know if you've noticed, but Western society is **super** into sex.
The problem is, though, that they aren't sure if they're welcome in LGBTQIA+ spaces, either.

Artist's Note: Collected from real online comments. I don't wanna do that again...


It takes a lot of time to realize that asexuality is a thing and may explain some things about them.
Which, in most cases, means they turn to the internet to learn more about it.
Which is why it's so sad that so much information on the internet is both **incorrect** and **full of hate**.
Asexuality: A New Tool For Attention-Seekers
It's enough to scare anyone away.

Of course, being asexual can also **intersect** with other LGBTQIA+ identities. You can be an ace lesbian, an ace bi person, an ace trans man.
Hells yeah!
"Asexual" only describes sexual attraction, not your feelings on relationships in general. If you're a woman who doesn't feel sexual attraction but does experience romantic feelings for women, you might be an ace lesbian. Happy to have you!
Similarly, being trans is about your own **personal identity** rather than who you are attracted to, so of course you can be an ace trans person.
And you are always very welcome at our table!
Come join us!

Finding an **ace community** to join and chat with other ace people is probably the best thing you can do when you're just figuring yourself out, or pretty much any time after that.
No one understands better than other people who have been through the same thing.
Talking with other ace people has been the most affirming part of understanding my demisexuality, and it helps that most people are super kind and chill.
And being able to interact with new people, make like-minded friends, and learn more online has helped me develop more confidence and value in myself despite my offline limitations.
Plus, it doesn't hurt that asexuality's two unofficial mascots are **axolotls** and **cake**.
The cutest thing and the most delicious thing.

So, are aces covered in LGBTQIA+ or not?
Well, there's really no right answer.
I know that I have internalized that "you're not welcome here" message to the point that I'm still not 100% comfortable calling myself queer, although other aces definitely are.
And I totally support them in that! Finding a space for yourself and owning it is a powerful and special thing.
On the other hand, I'm definitely comfortable being associated with the community. My best and longest relationships all came out of it, and I know I'm loved there!

The most important part of all of this is just to be **comfortable** in your own skin.
You're not broken. You're not a failure. You're **perfectly valid** and part of a **larger community**.
So, no matter how you live your life, as long as you're happy and comfortable with yourself, or working toward that, you're doing great.
Even if you're not so sure how you're feeling, that's alright. Talk to a counselor, talk to friends, find your community.
Because how you're feeling is **never wrong**.
Be **gentle** with yourself.
And be who you **are**.

Taking that into account, you'll want to figure out if you want to "come out" or not.
You don't have to tell people you're asexual if you don't want to, as it's no one's business but your own. But, you also have nothing to be embarrassed about.
I didn't tell anyone until I started writing this book, since it'd be public knowledge soon, anyway.
I'm super happy with the friends I've made and the chance to be an example for other aces to show that you can happily be yourself.
But it was also a weird conversation with my mom that we haven't really talked about since.
...
Oof, I feel that!
I'm not "out" to anyone outside of my online friend groups currently. Though, that may change with this book.
And, although it doesn't impact my day-to-day life too much, I tend to get nervous about how my "traditional" family will take it.

All you allos! If your friend, family member, coworker, or anyone comes out to you as being asexual, the best way to support them is to just **listen** to what they have to say and be **understanding**.
There's a good chance your friend is still figuring things out, and just being there for them is extremely helpful.
The important thing is not to try and "fix" them. It's not something to be fixed and will only make your friend feel **uncomfortable**.
Deep down, you know your friend. They haven't changed. Just treat them like you **care** about them and you're on the right track.

So remember:
Asexual people don't feel sexual attraction. They may feel romantic attraction or have sex, but they are **still asexual**.
Asexuality is a sexuality, just like being gay, straight, or bi. It's not a problem to be solved.
Aromantic people don't feel romantically toward others. Asexual people can also be aromantic, but those are two **separate** things.

Many asexual people have probably been confused for a long time, so be as **kind** and **understanding** as possible.
Make friends with **others**. Make friends with **yourself**.

But most of all:
Just be a **kind person**.
Whether you're an ace, friends with one, or just a member of the general public, there's nothing more important than being as **empathetic** and **thoughtful** as you can manage.
Really, that's all it comes down to, right?

That's a **wrap**, my friends!
Hopefully *you're* feeling a little more educated, and if *you* want to read up on more of this, there are resources in the back.
CLAP!
And now we're off–
–to get some **cake**!

Resources

Books on Asexuality

Ace: What Asexuality Reveals About Desire, Society, and the Meaning of Sex
by Angela Chen, Beacon Press, September 2020

Asexuality: A Brief Introduction (free PDF)
AsexualityArchive.com,
http://www.asexualityarchive.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/AsexualityABriefIntroduction.pdf

A Quick & Easy Guide to Queer and Trans Identities
by Mady G. and J.R. Zuckerberg, Limerence Press, 2019

The Invisible Orientation: An Introduction to Asexuality
by Julie Sondra Decke, Skyhorse Publishing, September 2014

Websites - Education, Resources, and Forums

Asexuality.org
https://www.asexuality.org/

The Trevor Project
https://www.thetrevorproject.org/trvr_support_center/asexual/

Queer As Cat, POC resources
https://queerascat.tumblr.com/apoc-resources

List of Ace-Friendly Therapists, Fuck Yeah Asexual
https://fuckyeahasexual.tumblr.com/post/150192839768/ace-friendly-therapists-masterpost-build

Will Hernandez

is a lifelong artist, and a first-time published comic creator/co-author. Though a passionate storyteller and draftsman, Will is also on an endless journey of discovery, looking to learn more about the world and, in turn, themself. Through ups and downs, they've discovered themself to be on the asexual spectrum, growing ever more curious of the role sexuality and gender play in society, and fond of the culture it creates.

Molly Muldoon

is a former scholar and bookseller, current librarian and writer, and always demisexual fan fiction enthusiast. Her works include *The Cardboard Kingdom, Dead Weight: Murder at Camp Bloom,* and the forthcoming *The Cardboard Kingdom: Roar of the Beast*. Although she's spent the past ten years globetrotting, she currently lives in Portland, Oregon, with her ridiculous cat, Jamie McKitten.

A quick, easy, and insightful educational comic guide on asexuality, unpacking myths about sexual attraction, romance, and ace life in Western society.

Nope

Nah

Asexuality is often called the "invisible orientation."

You don't learn about it in school and you don't hear "ace" on TV. So, it's kinda hard to be ace in a society so steeped in sex that no one knows you exist! Too many young people grow up believing their lack of sexual attraction means they're broken. That's why writer Molly Muldoon and cartoonist Will Hernandez, both in the ace community, are here to shed light on society's misconceptions of asexuality and share what being ace is really like. This guide is for anyone who wants to learn about asexuality, and for ace people themselves as validation of their experiences.

"**Charming and informative, *A Quick & Easy Guide to Asexuality* is the identity primer I wish I'd had growing up.** Filled to the brim with delightful illustrations and examples galore, this graphic novel covers everything from Asexuality 101 to personal experiences in a fun and accessible way. Best enjoyed with an open mind and a slice of cake."

— ROSIEE THOR, author of *Tarnished Are the Stars*

LIMERENCE